

**Remarks on Signing an Executive Order Establishing the Task Force on Missing and Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives and an Exchange With Reporters**

*November 26, 2019*

*The President.* Okay. Thank you very much. It is my honor to sign an Executive order—we're going to be doing it right now—to address a tragedy facing Native American communities: the crisis of missing and murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives, in particular women and children. It's a tremendous problem. It's been going on for a long time, many, many decades, beyond that. And we're going to address it and address it very strongly.

We're grateful to be joined by Attorney General William Barr, Secretary David Bernhardt, other members of my administration, and several terrific Native American leaders. These are great leaders.

The statistics are sobering and heartbreaking. Recently, more than 5,000 Native American women and girls were reported missing in a single year. While the majority return home or are found, too many are still missing and their whereabouts are unknown, and they usually don't find them.

One study showed that Native American women in certain tribal communities are 10 times more likely to be murdered than the average American. The victims and their families deserve action. And this should have happened many years ago.

With my order today, we're launching Operation Lady Justice, an interagency Task Force led by Attorney General Barr and Secretary Bernhardt to develop an aggressive, Governmentwide strategy to end this terrible situation. The Department of Justice will also be issuing grants to improve safety in Native American communities.

We will leverage every resource we have to bring safety to our Tribal communities, and we will not waver in this mission. We're taking this very seriously. This has never been done before. And I've seen it, just by reading and watching the news; it's a very serious problem. It's a horrible problem.

This is only the latest action my administration has taken to support American Indians and Alaska Natives. I signed legislation restoring benefits that were unfairly taken away from Alaska Natives serving in Vietnam. In March, I launched an initiative to improve the health and safety of children in the care of Indian Health Service. And, in September, we hosted the first-ever National Tribal Broadband Summit. And, earlier this month, the White House hosted the first-ever Native American Veterans Conference. Some of the folks in the room were there.

With Operation Lady Justice, we will bring new hope to Native American communities across the Nation. We will deliver justice for the victims, closure for the families, and safety to those in harm's way. And, on behalf of every missing or murdered Native American woman and child, I am going to sign this order, and it will be a great honor to be signing this order. And thank you all for being here. Thank you very much.

*Participants.* Thank you, Mr. President.

*[At this point, the President signed the Executive order.]*

*The President.* So that's something that should have been done a long time ago, decades ago, frankly.

So we have with us some of the great leaders: Melanie Benjamin, Chief Executive of the Mille Lacs Band.

*Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Chief Executive Melanie Benjamin.* Of Ojibwe.

*The President.* We have Myron—and would you say something—would you like to say something? Come here a minute, Melanie. Say a few words, please.

[*Chief Executive Benjamin spoke in Ojibwe, and no translation was provided. She then continued in English as follows.*]

*Chief Executive Benjamin.* And it is my honor and my privilege to be here today with the signing, because we cannot have this happening anymore. It's a historical day to know that our missing and murdered women have a place and a remembrance and that we care about them and their families.

So, Mr. President, *chi-miigwech*. Thank you very much.

*The President.* Thank you. Thank you, Melanie. That's really nice.

*Chief Executive Benjamin.* I really appreciate that.

*The President.* Thank you very much, Melanie. I appreciate that.

We have Myron Lizer, Vice President of the Navajo Nation, and Dottie Lizer and Halle Lizer. Myron, maybe say a few words, if you would, please.

*Navajo Nation Vice President Myron Lizer.* Yes, sir. I'm honored, President. Thank you for having us at this historic legislation—or Executive order. The Navajo Nation thanks you, and much more, First Nations thanks you. As the host people of the land, we feel that our prayers are being answered. And First Nations' prayers are powerful. So thank you, Mr. President.

*The President.* Thank you very much.

*Vice President Lizer.* We look forward to seeing some improvement in Indian Country.

*The President.* Thank you very much. I appreciate that. Thank you very much, Myron.

We have a man whose name I want to use. I maybe have to change my name, because I love this name: Alvin "A.J." Not Afraid. [*Laughter*] Chairman of the Crow Nation. I love this name. [*Laughter*]

*Crow Nation Chairman Alvin Not Afraid.* Thank you, President.

*The President.* Where are you? Come here. Say a few words.

*Chairman Not Afraid.* Yes, sir. First of all, President, we are honored that you recognize the Native Nations, as well as the Crow Nation. We have been proponents of the Trump administration and all the endeavors.

*The President.* Thank you.

*Chairman Not Afraid.* And understanding that I personally am affected by the missing and murdered indigenous women events that are circulating. So knowing that you support in the realm of this Executive order, the Crow Tribe is honored. Thank you, Mr. President.

*The President.* Well, thank you for coming. I appreciate it very much.

Is that true, you're not afraid? Are you not afraid of anything?

*Chairman Not Afraid.* I also—yes, sir.

*The President.* [*Laughter*] I want to know.

*Chairman Not Afraid.* I also have a gift of our support of the Trump administration.

*The President.* Oh, that's beautiful. Thank you. That's very nice. Thank you. Thank you very much. That's very nice.

Kevin DuPuis, Chairman of the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. Where is—

*Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Tribal Chairman Kevin DuPuis.* Right here, Mr. President.

*The President.* Good. Thank you, please.

*Chairman DuPuis.* Thank you.

[*Chairman DuPuis spoke in Ojibwe, and no translation was provided. He then continued in English as follows.*]

*Chairman DuPuis.* Mr. President, this directly affects me, just as—like it did to my brother over there—Anne Marie, as my sister, was one of these statistics at one time.

The importance to us, as one of—as tribal leaders and as a unique people—to take a look at this. And how we look at it is: Our women are the ones who raise our children. Our women are the ones who take care of our village. Our women are the ones who take care of communities, our teachers. Our children are our future. And these are both being affected in that way.

And it's absolutely—what's the right word to use? How about if I just say this way—

*The President.* Imperative.

*Chairman DuPuis.* It's—yes, it's imperative that this changes, in a manner that we're looked at not as the second-class citizens, but looked like—looked at as any other group that exists within the continent of the United States.

It's—because it's very, very important that we, as a people, have a true identity. And when we lose our women and we lose our children, that goes with them. And if we look at the principles of seven generations forward—for every child that has gone, every woman that's gone, that's seven generations.

So it's imperative that this is taken care of in a manner that we unite, we become one, and we look out to protect all women and children. It doesn't matter what color they are—all women and children. So thank you.

*The President.* Thank you very—it was very well stated. I appreciate it.

And Roger Smith. Where is Roger?

*Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Representative Roger M. Smith.* Right here.

*The President.* Roger, come on over here. Go ahead.

*Rep. Smith.* I like to say *chi-miigwech*, Mr. President. As a member of law enforcement for over 20 years, in looking at—in the Tribal government—I'm also honored to be sitting on Governor Walz from Minnesota's Task Force on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. And to see—to do away with the party line of addressing this very important issue. And again, I thank you for this today.

*The President.* Thank you very much. Thank you very much. Great to have you here.

Maybe I could ask our great Attorney General to say a few words, and then David Bernhardt. They've worked very hard on this.

*Attorney General William P. Barr.* Mr. President, this is very much in keeping with your commitment to focus on the issues of those who haven't gotten the priority they deserved in the past. This is—as you know, this is a very vexing and dangerous issue in Indian Country.

*The President.* That's right.

*Attorney General Barr.* And I appreciate your leadership on it. And I'm looking forward to working with the Secretary on this Task Force.

*The President.* Good. Thank you very much. Thanks, Bill.

And David, please.

*Secretary of the Interior David L. Bernhardt.* Mr. President, this is an opportunity to bring the expertise of the Department of Justice and the experience and expertise of Interior, together with our teams, to work for these communities that desperately can use our help. And we're excited about it.

*The President.* Thank you. You're doing a great job.

*Secretary Bernhardt.* Thank you, sir.

*The President.* A very great job.

So this is very important. It's very important to me and to David and to Bill and to everybody here. And these are great leaders. They've suffered tremendously, and we're going to see if we can stop that.

So thank you all for being here. Thank you very much. Appreciate it. Thank you.

#### *Hong Kong Elections/China-U.S. Trade*

*Q.* Mr. President, one question on Hong Kong, sir. Did you watch the results coming in of the election they just had in Hong Kong?

*The President.* Yes, I did. Yes, I did.

*Q.* And what's your message to the people who voted for those prodemocracy parties?

*The President.* Well, we're with them. I have a very good relationship, as you know, with President Xi. We're in the final throes of a very important deal, I guess you could say, one of the most important deals in trade ever. It's going very well. But, at the same time, we want to see it go well in Hong Kong, and I think it will. I think that President Xi can make that happen. And I know him, and I know he'd like to make it happen.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:24 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Dottie Lizer, wife, and Halle Lizer, daughter, of Vice President Lizer.

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